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# How Promising is the Second Chance Act in Reducing Recidivism among Male Ex-Offenders in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi?

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*This study examines the effectiveness of reentry programs as provided by the Second Chance Act of 2007 in reducing recidivism among ex-offender males in the southern states of Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi. Drawing on secondary data coming mainly from the Bureau of Justice Statistics the study uses multivariate analysis to assess the factors that explain recidivism, and evaluate the impact of the Second Chance legislation on recidivism among young adult males in the three states. Findings indicate that imprisoned Black and Hispanic males, as well as median household income are significant predictors of recidivism. Additionally, the study finds that, three years after its implementation, the Second Chance Act has achieved significant recidivism reduction among males in two of the three states under study (Georgia and Mississippi), and it is, therefore, a promising legislation for decreasing criminal recidivism.*

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Recidivism is a perennial problem plaguing the criminal justice system in the United States. It has been defined as the re-arrest, re-conviction, or re-incarceration of an ex-offender within three years of release (James 2011, 6). Many scholars view recidivism as one of the greatest obstacles to smooth reintegration of ex-offenders into their communities (Johnson 2008; Langan and Levin 2002). Some studies show that the increased rate of recidivism is also linked to a growing prison population in the United States (McKean and Ransford 2004; U.S. Department of Justice 2004). The increasing trend in the national prison population is also reflected at the state level. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2004) the three states under research experienced a significant increase in the incarcerated population over a period of 15 years. Therefore, from 1990 to 2005 the total prison population of Alabama increased by over 178 percent, that of Georgia increased by nearly 218 percent, and that of Mississippi increased by 245 percent.

As a result of prison overcrowding, a large number of those incarcerated are being released from prisons without being ready to be successfully reintegrated into society. Most of the released offenders are associated with criminal behavior that involves serious crimes such as child abuse, family violence, the spread of infectious diseases, homelessness, community disorganization and the like (Petersilia 2000, 1).

Existing evidence suggests that the tendency to reoffend is high among racial minorities, especially African-American males, who are released into “resource-deprived” and racially segregated neighborhoods (McKean and Ransford 2004; Mears et al. 2008; Wheeler and Patterson 2008). The comparatively high incarceration rate of minorities has been attributed to discriminatory sentencing practices in the criminal justice system (Stefensmeier, Ulmer and Kramer 1998; Petersilia 1985).

In the last two to three decades, reentry programs in the form of collaborative public-private partnerships have been adopted throughout the country to assist offenders and prisoners to transition back into their communities as law abiding citizens. While such partnerships have been successful, their applicability was limited by location and time in as much as they have been classified as demonstration or pilot programs. The Second Chance Act (SCA) was adopted in 2008 as a comprehensive legislation focusing on employment assistance and job-skills training, substance abuse and mental health treatment, family-based support, and mentoring activities. The SCA built upon the aforementioned pilot projects with the intent of addressing the issue of recidivism nationally.

Considering the tendency to reoffend among ex-prisoners is on the rise (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics online), and the tendency of minorities to have higher incarceration rates when compared to non-minorities, this study assesses the effectiveness of the SCA in reducing recidivism among males in the Southern states of Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi. The rest of the study is structured as follows: it describes the issue of prisoner reintegration; then it discusses the theoretical framework and the empirical literature on re-entry and recidivism; it further describes the research questions and the methodology used; then, it presents the findings related to factors that influence recidivism, and the effectiveness of the SCA in reducing recidivism, and concludes with a discussion of results and an overall conclusion.

### ***Problem Statement***

The process of reintegrating ex-offenders into society has been a persistent and challenging social issue for decades. Reentry programs aim at promoting the reintegration of ex-offenders into their communities after they are released from prison or jail. They have been an important part of correctional institutions in the United States for the greater part of the 1900s (Seiter and Kadela 2003). During that period, correctional institutions emphasized rehabilitation of inmates through programs comprised of educational and vocational programs, substance abuse and other counseling programs, and prison industry work programs that prepared inmates for a smooth transition into the community (Seiter and Kadela 2003). Between 1950s and 1970s sentencing of offenders assumed the indeterminate sentencing posture, whereby offenders were released based on their readiness to return to the community. In the 1980s the sentencing of offenders shifted to determinate sentencing with a focus on incarceration. The shift was due to several factors such as the philosophical doctrine of incarceration (Seiter and Kadela 2003), the increase in crime rate and prison population, and the public tough perception on crime (Levy 2000). Additional factors refer to the belief that rehabilitation does not work, the decrease in prison funding and transitional programs, and the change in parole supervision from rehabilitation to deterrence which stresses “punishment and incapacitation” (Seiter and Kadela 2003).

Recent studies state that, under determinate sentencing, prisoners are released without adequate preparation for a smooth transition into the community, availability of fewer social services in the community to accommodate their needs, and less family support to rekindle their faith and value system. Consequently, most ex-offenders are sent back to prison for committing new crimes (Ward et al. 2013). Almost two-thirds of ex-offenders are

documented to be re-arrested for new crimes “within three years following their release” from prison for a serious misdemeanor or felony case, with more than 50 percent of released prisoners being re-incarcerated for parole and probation violation (Langan and Levin 2002).

The increase in the number of prisoners returning to communities across the country has fueled a national debate about how to handle what has become known as the “prisoner reentry crisis” (Travis, McBride and Solomon 2005). One solution for addressing the “reentry crisis” has been identified in the form of public-private partnerships that assist offenders, prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families. Some of these collaborative partnerships of government with faith-based and community organizations include the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) launched by the Department of Justice in 2002 to assist the successful integration of ex-offenders into the community; Ready for Work (Ready4Work) program, a public-private partnership involving the Department of Labor, local and community-based organizations, as well as faith-based organizations to provide employment and job placement services for non-violent ex-offenders; the Weed and Seed program of the City of Fort Wayne, Indiana, the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency of the District of Columbia, and the Maryland Reentry Partnership (Bassford 2008) through which offenders were “matched with community-based service providers before” their release and benefited from services such as transitional housing, vocational and educational training and counseling (Brassford 2008). Other partnerships refer to job placement (Moses 2012), vocational and educational programs, drug rehabilitation programs, prison release programs, and halfway house programs (Seiter and Kadela 2003).

The Second Chance Act (SCA) builds upon the reentry demonstration programs, especially, those developed under SVORI (U.S. Code § 17501 2008). Enacted by Congress in April 2008, the SCA legislation offered a multifaceted approach to help reduce recidivism and increase public safety. Program activities covered under the Act include employment assistance and job-skills training, substance abuse and mental health treatment, housing assistance, family-based support, as well as individual and group mentoring activities. In addition, the legislation provided for satellite tracking and electronic monitoring of “high risk” offenders upon their release into the community (U.S. Code § 17501 2008).

The Act authorized the Attorney General to provide funding to state, local, tribal agencies and community organizations for the provision of critical services in order to make a person’s transition from prison or jail to the community more successful (U.S. Code § 17501 2008). Accordingly, “since 2009, over 300 government agencies and nonprofit organizations from 48 states have received grant awards for reentry programs serving both adults and juveniles” (Council of State Governments Justice Center online).

Between 2009 and 2012 the federal government provided \$271 to fund the Second Chance Act programs. Funds were distributed as follows: \$25 million in 2009, \$100 million in 2010, followed by \$83 and \$63 million in 2011 and 2012 respectively (Council of State Governments online). Besides providing federal grants to improve existing federal funded demonstration projects for offenders, the Act also extended grants to non-profit organizations to mentor offenders (U.S. Code § 17501 2008).

In order to shed light on the reentry crisis, this study aims at examining the factors that contribute to explaining recidivism, and the effectiveness of the SCA in reducing the problem of recidivism three years after its adoption in the southern states of Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi.

### ***On Reentry and Recidivism***

Theoretical perspectives on reentry and recidivism may be classified into two broad categories: rehabilitation and reintegration policies, and punitive correctional policies (Cullen and Gendreau 2000). Rehabilitation programs are rooted in the philosophical ideals of reintegration and reformation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Seiter and Kadela 2003) whereas punitive correctional policies are associated with deterrence and incapacitation (Cullen and Gendreau 2000). This study is guided by the approach of reintegration and reformation policies.

The research paradigm for this study is the structural functional theory of understanding society. Structural functionalists view society as a social system with interconnected parts, each performing a specific function for the maintenance of the whole organization (Babbie 2010). Researchers adopting the structural functional paradigm might view the function of the correction system, for example, as exercising social control for individuals “to abide by the norms of society and bringing to justice those resorting to deviant behavior” (Babbie 2010, 38). The relevant part of the theory identified in this study refers to whether the impact of reentry programs has been successful in reintegrating young adult male ex-offenders into the society.

The issue of effective rehabilitation of offenders prior to their reintegration into the society has generated intense discussion among scholars and practitioners in recent decades (Griffiths, Dandurand and Murdoch 2007). There is a debate in the extant literature concerning the effectiveness of reentry programs with two schools of thought having emerged on the reentry debate. The first school views the success of reentry programs focusing on job-skills training and job placement programs as the most effective policies in reducing recidivism among ex-offenders (Bauldry and McClanahan 2008). First, a number of studies within this school of thought indicate that vocational and/or work release programs are effective in reducing recidivism, and improve job readiness skills for ex-offenders (James 2012; Seiter and Kadela 2003, 373), especially in the case of motivated offenders (Skardhamar and Telle 2009; Visser, Winterfield and Coggeshall 2006).

Second, there are studies indicating that a higher level of educational attainment leads to crime reduction (Lochner 2010; Lochner and Moretti 2001), especially when accompanied by the possibility of earning a living wage because it increases opportunities for lawful work and higher wages (O’Sullivan 2007, 268-269). Additionally, educational programs, such as “coursework and vocational training” are fundamental tools for reducing recidivism (Mears et al. 2008; Gaes 2008), especially when combined with employment programs and “psychotherapeutic treatment” (Listwan, Cullen and Latessa 2006).

Third, another line of research agrees that substance abuse treatment programs reduce criminal behavior (Wormith et al. 2007; McKean and Ransford 2004). Also, continuity of care after release from incarceration has been documented to be an essential component of effective mental health treatment for those in need (Griffith, Dandurand and Murdoch 2007).

Forth, some studies have attributed family support to the success of offenders in their reintegration process (Brooks, Visser, and Nasser 2005; Bobbitt and Nelson 2004; Visser and Travis 2003), and employment opportunities in their communities (Austin and Hardyman 2004, 20). Fifth, another category of studies has suggested that mentoring and counseling represent rehabilitative services for offenders when used in conjunction with programs such as transitional housing, and vocational and educational training (Bassford 2008).

Sixth, the lack of availability of housing assistance programs for ex-offenders has been documented as having negative consequences on the reintegration process (Griffiths, Dandurand and Murdoch 2007). Programs that offer transitional housing for ex-prisoners have been found to be effective and offenders that participated in halfway houses committed less

severe and significantly fewer offenses than those who did not participate in such programs (James 2011, 13).

Last but not least, within the first school of thought there are studies that demonstrate that the reduction of new court commitments is due to the combination of several reentry programs such as job skills training, substance abuse and mental health treatment, housing assistance, cognitive skills-building and other rehabilitation programs (Geither 2012; Bloom 2006; Gendreau, French, and Gionet 2004).

The second school of thought on the reentry debate discounts the effectiveness of job reentry programs in reducing recidivism. It dismisses any correlation between reentry programs and recidivism (Moses 2012; Martinson 1974) unless such programs are integrated with community-based resources for released offenders (Seiter and Kadela 2003, 376).

To sum up, whereas a large number of studies are optimistic that rehabilitation services are capable of reintegrating offenders into the community in order to contribute their quota to society, others view reentry initiatives as ineffective. The pessimists often cite evaluation studies that sought to dismiss the perception that offenders could be rehabilitated. Most scholars point to the correlation between employment training, education and recidivism reduction, while others view substance abuse and mental health treatments as critical for crime desistance.

### ***Research Questions and Hypotheses***

The objectives of this study are to examine the factors contributing to recidivism among ex-offenders and to assess the relationship between reentry programs and recidivism. The study employs an interrupted time series research design to determine the extent to which reentry programs under the Second Chance Act contribute to the reduction of recidivism of ex-offender males in the three southern states of Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi.

The study contributes to the ongoing investigative research on the possible connections between reentry services and the cycle of criminal recidivism in the United States by aiming to answer the following questions:

- What factors contribute significantly to the recidivism of ex-offenders? And
- To what extent have reentry programs under the Second Chance Act reduced recidivism among young adult male ex-offenders?

In order to answer the above-mentioned research questions, three hypotheses have been formulated:

*H1: Young adult African-American males are associated with a higher number of new court sentences when compared to other incarcerated males in the three southern states.* A number of studies have suggested that incarceration affects minorities disproportionately, particularly young adult males of African American descent (Wheeler and Patterson 2008; Mauer and King 2007; McKean and Ransford 2004). In addition to having the highest rate of incarceration, African American young males also have the highest rate of recidivism when compared to Whites and other minorities (Walsh and Kosson 2007). The re-incarceration rate of African Americans has been reported as being three times higher than that of Whites (Boulger, Bostwick and Powers 2012). The tendency to re-offend is documented to be high among racial minorities because they are released into resource deprived and racially segregated neighborhoods (Maers et al. 2008; Reising et al. 2007), and because of discriminatory sentencing practices in the criminal justice system (Steffensmeier, Ulmer and

Kramer 1998). When re-entering their communities African American ex-offenders are subject to racial inequality (Miller 2010; Reising et al. 2007). Within this context, our intent is to examine the impact of race on recidivism. Consistent with the views expressed in the extant literature our expectation is that African American young male prisoners will have a higher recidivism rate than Whites and other minorities.

*H2: There is an inverse relationship between real median household income and recidivism in the three states.* In addition to racial disparities, the high rate of incarceration and re-incarceration is explained by socio-economic disparities (Miller 2010; Walsh and Kosson 2007). Economic inequities linked to race lead to higher recidivism rates among African American young males (Reising et al. 2007). Moreover, members of lower income households are more likely to engage in criminal behavior than members of higher income households (Truman 2011). Since existing studies have linked higher wages to crime reduction and have indicated a strong association between improved wages and decrease in antisocial behavior (Lochner 2010; Yang and Lester 1994), our expectation is to find that an increase in the median household income leads to a decrease in recidivism among young male ex-offenders.

*H3: The adoption of the Second Chance Act has resulted in the reduction of recidivism among young males in the states of Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi.* Langan and Levin (2002) indicate that almost 68 percent of ex-prisoners receive new sentences within three years of their release. This hypothesis, therefore, examines the trend of new sentences within the three states to find out whether new sentences committed by young adult males decreased after the implementation of the SCA. The expectation is to demonstrate that, despite being a fairly new policy, the SCA contributed to recidivism reduction.

The study is among the first attempts to assess the impact of the law on crime desistance. It, therefore, attempts to fill an existing gap in the literature by shedding light on the connections between reentry services and recidivism in the United States. Unlike previous studies that assessed the effectiveness of reentry programs for ex-offenders as pilot projects, this investigation adopts a holistic approach by examining the cumulative effect of the different reentry programs under the Second Chance Act on crime desistance.

## **Data and Methods**

The study employs longitudinal data covering the 1995 to 2011 time-frame. Data comes from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau, National Prisoner Statistics<sup>1</sup>, U.S. Bureau of Prisons, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Reentry Resource Center from the Council of State Governments Justice Center, and Reports from the Reentry Policy Council. Additional data sources include data from public-private partnerships on reentry services and correctional facilities in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi.

The target population of the study is represented by young adult male ex-offenders between the ages of 18 and 39. The geographic areas for this research are the states of Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi. These three states have been chosen because they are all southern states with high incarceration rates that share similar socio-demographic indicators.

An ordinary least square (OLS) regression method is being used to test hypotheses 1 and 2, and a segmented time series regression is used to test hypothesis 3 of the study. The latter quantitative modeling compares the trend in recidivism prior to the enactment of the Second Chance Act (the pre-implementation period) with the post-implementation trend to ascertain whether there is any significant difference between the two trends (Schutt 2009, 233). The pre-intervention time period covers the years ranging from 2004 to 2007, and the post intervention period is between 2009 and 2011.

The dependent variable for this research is recidivism among young adult male ex-offenders. In this study recidivism is operationalized (based on the definition of the Bureau of Justice Statistics and Bureau of Prisons) as re-conviction with a new court sentence imposed on ex-offenders within three years of release. The analysis combines new court commitments, parole violators with new sentences and other conditional released violators from the National Prisoner Statistics data set into a new variable of new court sentences (new sentences)<sup>ii</sup>.

The study incorporates four predictor variables as follows: four independent variables that measure the number of young adult male ex-offenders by race (*White males*, *Black males*, *Hispanic males* and *other race males*)<sup>iii</sup>. The fifth independent variable is the implementation of the SCA. In addition, there are two control variables: the real median household income of the three states between 1995 and 2011 which denotes the income of an individual householder who owns or rents the residential accommodation, or incomes of the householder plus other residents aged 15 years and over<sup>iv</sup> (U.S. Census Bureau 2013), and unemployment rates operationalized as the ratio of the number of unemployed to the total labor force of each of the three states under study from 1995 to 2011 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics online).

The first part of the analysis used OLS with robust standard errors to address the violation of the independence of the error terms. Robust standard errors are appropriate in such instances because they intend to relax the assumption that errors are independent (Cox Downey 2016, 59; Hayes 2007). Variables *Hispanic males* and *other race males* were transformed using a logarithm operation to meet the assumption of normality.

The second part of the analysis employed segmented time series regression which is suitable for statistical comparisons of time trends with at least three data points before and three data points after the SCA's implementation. This statistical procedure estimates the effect of the intervention while taking into account the time trend and autocorrelation among observations (Garson 2013; Ramsay et al. 2003).

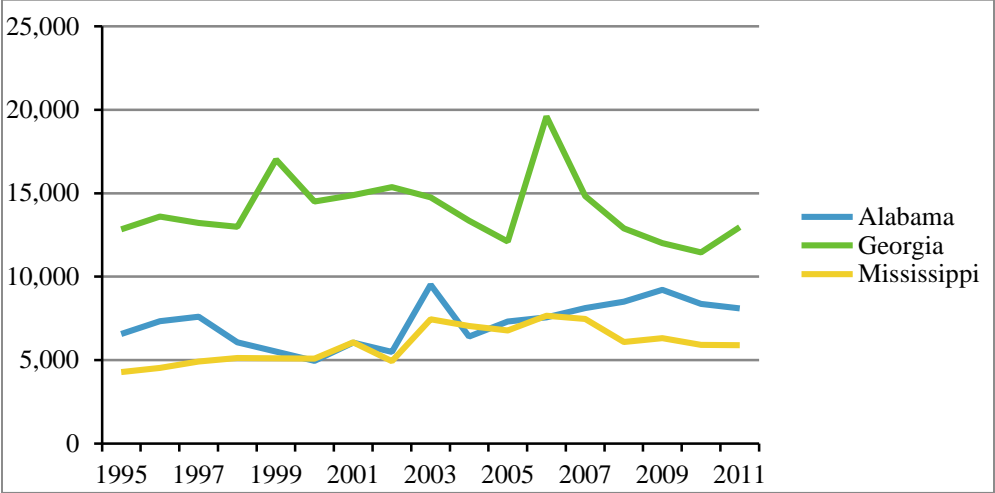
## Findings

The results of this study are presented in two main sections: the first section presents findings related to factors that influence the recidivism of ex-offenders over a 17 year time span (1995-2011), and the second section presents findings related to the implementation of the SCA three years before and after its adoption.

Figure 1 depicts the number of new sentences among imprisoned males in the three Southern states from 1995 to 2011. While the number of new sentences fluctuated over the 17 time frame, overall all three states showed an increase in the number of new sentences, with Mississippi having the largest increase (1616), followed by Alabama (1540) and Georgia (130). When looking at the trend in new sentences from the implementation of the SCA in 2008 until 2011, we notice that Alabama and Mississippi showed a decrease in the number of new sentences by 392 and 193 respectively whereas Georgia showed a slight increase of 85 new sentences.



Figure 1: Number of New Sentences 1995-2011



The three states under study started receiving federal money in 2010 with Georgia receiving the most (\$1,568,787) and Mississippi the least money (\$159,807) (Council of State Governments’ Justice Center online). The magnitude of funds allocated seem to have been granted based on the number of new sentences in the three states: Georgia had the highest number and Mississippi the lowest number of new sentences. All three states received funds for mentoring programs; Georgia received money to support the most reentry programs among the three states, as follows: planning and implementation, local demonstration programs, substance abuse and mental health, and technology career projects. In addition to mentoring grants, Mississippi benefited from funds supporting reentry planning projects.

Factors that Influence Recidivism

Descriptive statistics for the variables used in the first part of the analysis are depicted in Table 1. On average, the number of Black imprisoned males is twice higher than that of imprisoned White males. The number of imprisoned Hispanic males is very low due to the fact that all three states have a low number of Hispanics in general. Also, the average number of new sentences is slightly over 9,100 and the average real household income for the time frame under study is \$20,594.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
New Sentences	9,125	3,895	50
White Males	9,652	4,472	50
Black Males	18,801	6,990	50
Hispanic Males	235	435	50
Real Income	\$20,594	2,427	50

When broken down by race, the imprisoned population of the three states consists of mainly Blacks and Whites. As described in Table 2, over time the percentage of incarcerated

Black males declined in all three states, whereas the percentage of incarcerated White males increased in two states (Alabama and Mississippi) and stagnated in Georgia.

**Table 2: Percentage of Imprisoned Males by Race**

	Alabama			Georgia			Mississippi		
Year	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics
1995	34.26%	65.46%	0.01%	31.93%	67.76%	0.78%	24.82%	74.43%	0.50%
1996	34.01%	65.66%	0.01%	32.10%	67.50%	0.79%	24.50%	75.00%	0.32%
1997	33.78%	65.86%	0.00%	32.44%	67.19%	0.85%	24.90%	74.59%	0.40%
1998	33.29%	66.37%	0.02%	32.92%	66.62%	0.86%	24.18%	75.29%	0.37%
1999	33.77%	65.93%	0.02%	33.05%	66.54%	0.27%	24.07%	75.45%	0.36%
2000	33.21%	66.47%	0.00%	33.25%	65.40%	1.07%	25.86%	73.56%	0.37%
2001	34.71%	64.97%	0.00%	34.10%	64.40%	1.23%	27.25%	72.21%	0.38%
2002	35.87%	63.82%	0.00%	34.78%	62.68%	1.98%	27.86%	71.47%	0.45%
2003	36.90%	62.87%	0.00%	35.94%	61.12%	2.34%	29.20%	70.07%	0.50%
2004	38.01%	61.76%	0.00%	31.01%	66.08%	2.60%	29.03%	70.02%	0.64%
2005	39.15%	60.66%	0.00%	36.68%	59.98%	2.72%	28.72%	70.28%	0.66%
2006	39.15%	60.67%	0.00%	36.82%	58.75%	2.67%	29.25%	69.77%	0.64%
2007	38.60%	61.24%	0.00%	37.12%	62.22%	0.00%	28.93%	69.90%	0.81%
2008	38.30%	61.55%	0.00%	36.10%	63.17%	0.00%	28.89%	69.94%	0.87%
2009	38.40%	61.47%	0.00%	32.30%	63.75%	0.00%	30.05%	68.92%	0.79%
2010	39.02%	60.84%	0.00%	32.30%	63.75%	0.00%	30.62%	68.32%	0.78%
2011	39.69%	60.16%	0.00%	31.72%	63.87%	4.02%	30.82%	68.20%	0.72%

Table 3 shows the magnitude of correlations between the dependent and independent variables as well as correlations between the independent variables. The dependent variable, new sentences, is highly correlated with White (.87) and Black (.89) imprisoned males as well as with median household income (.82), and medium correlated with Hispanic imprisoned males (.60), suggesting that an increasing number of new sentences are positively associated with Blacks, Whites, Hispanics and household income.

**Table 3: Bivariate Correlations between Predictor Variables**

Variable	New Sentences	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics
Whites	.87**			
Blacks	.89**	.94**		
Hispanics	.60**	.62**	.69**	
Real income	.82**	.76**	.75**	.39*

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 also shows that Whites and Blacks are highly correlated (.94), suggesting multicollinearity. To correct for multicollinearity we conducted two regression models – one with Blacks only and another one with Whites only.

The results of the OLS regression models are presented in Table 4. Model 1 accounts for explaining 87% of the variance in recidivism. The strongest predictor variable of new sentences is Black imprisoned males ( $b = .605$ ) which suggests that for every incarcerated Black male there is a corresponding .605 increase in the number of new sentences. The second most significant predictor of new sentences in Model 1 is median household income (.333).

This predictor has a different direction than the hypothesized one, and it suggests that a \$1 increase in the median household income generates a .33 increase in the number of new sentences. Finally, incarcerated Hispanic males predicted that for every increase in the number of incarcerated Hispanic males there is a corresponding .15 increase in the number of new sentences.

**Table 4: OLS of Predictor Variables for New Sentences**

Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	p-value	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	p-value
Intercept	-89215	2149			-6598	2170		
Blacks/Whites	0.337	0.046	0.605	0.001	0.563	0.07	0.647	0.001
Income	0.534	0.133	0.333	0.001	0.437	0.131	0.272	0.002
Hispanics	501	180	0.151	0.008	912	170	0.276	0.001

R<sup>2</sup> = .87; N= 49 | Durbin-Watson = 1.60      R<sup>2</sup> = .89, N=49 | Durbin-Watson= 1.75

For the second regression model the strongest predictor of new sentences is represented by White imprisoned males (.647), meaning that for every incarcerated White male there is a .647 increase in the number of new sentences. The second strongest predictor in Model 2 is Hispanic imprisoned-males (.276), suggesting that for every increase in the number of imprisoned Hispanic males there is a corresponding increase of .276 in the number of new sentences. Finally, the last predictor of new sentences is median household income (.276), suggesting that for every \$1 increase in the median household income there is a .276 increase in the number of new sentences.

As mentioned before, both Black and White imprisoned males are the strongest predictors of new sentences. Considering the fact that the number of incarcerated Black males is significantly higher than the number of incarcerated White males we consider the first OLS model to be more relevant for our study.

***Effectiveness of the Second Chance Act in Reducing Recidivism***

This section examines the impact of the Second Chance Act in reducing the number of new sentences by comparing time trends three years before (2004-2007) and three years after its implementation (2009-2011). The results of the segmented regression analysis are presented in Table 5. In terms of slope, the results demonstrate that three years before the intervention, all three states showed an increase in the number of new sentences, as follows: Alabama had an increase of 131, Georgia 117 and Mississippi 246 new sentences per year. Three years after the intervention the slope for new sentences in two states was decreasing (Alabama by 559 and Mississippi by 25 per year) whereas the slope for new sentences in Georgia was increasing by 753 new sentences a year.

The segmented regression analysis also showed significant decreases in recidivism for the three year level effect in the case of two states: Georgia and Mississippi. Georgia experienced a decrease of 4145 and Mississippi had a decrease of 1798 new sentences three years after the implementation of the SCA. In Alabama the adoption of the SCA indicated an increase of 1208 of new sentences which means that there was no effect of SCA on recidivism three years after its intervention.

**Table 5: Impact of the SCA on New Sentences in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi**

State	Pre Slope		Post Slope		Level Effect	
	$\beta$ /SE	p	$\beta$ /SE	p	$\beta$ /SE	p
Alabama	131 (77.5)	0.114	-559 (827)	0.511	1208 (1255)	0.353
Georgia	117 (109)	0.301	753 (1381)	0.596	-4145 (2019)	0.062
Mississippi	246 (37)	0	-25 (506)	0.961	-1798 (755)	0.035

Summing up, the OLS regression analysis demonstrated that changes in the number of new sentences is influenced by changes in three explanatory factors, as follows: the number of young adult Black and Hispanic imprisoned males as well as median household income. The study also indicates that the impact of the SCA legislation has had a positive impact in two of the three states. The implementation of the Act has resulted in a decline in the number of new sentences among young adult ex-offender males in Georgia and Mississippi but not in Alabama.

### ***Discussion and Conclusions***

This study examined the influence of factors that significantly predicted recidivism, and the impact of the adoption of the Second Chance Act in the reduction of recidivism among young adult male ex-offenders in the three southern states of Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi. Over a 17 year span, the imprisoned male population in the three states consisted of mainly Blacks and Whites, with twice more Black than White imprisoned males. As hypothesized in this study, Black imprisoned males had a higher recidivism than any other imprisoned males under study. Besides representing the largest proportion of the imprisoned male population, Blacks also have the highest amount of recidivism. Additionally, among minorities, Black imprisoned males commit more new sentences than Hispanic imprisoned males.

Our findings are consistent with previous views expressed in the literature that young Black males are incarcerated at higher rates than young White males (Mauer and King 2007). In addition, results, indicate that between 1995 and 2011, White males were incarcerated at higher rates than Hispanic males in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi, and hence, in disagreement with the assertion of Mauer and King that young Hispanic males have higher incarceration rates than young White males. This fact can be explained by the low proportion of both general and incarcerated Hispanic male population in the three states under analysis.

Overall, median household income was a significant predictor of recidivism but it had a different direction than the one initially hypothesized. Results indicated that the number of new court sentences among adult males increased as household income rose, and decreased as household income declined. This finding might be partially explained by the fact that lower income households might have had more females than males as heads of household.

When looking at the breakdown of the correlation between median household income and new sentences by state, it can be noticed that the two concepts are significantly correlated in Alabama and Georgia at -.45 and .72 respectively, and are not significantly correlated in Mississippi. This fact appears to suggest that criminal activity among young adult males between ages 18 and 39 are not influenced by household income in Mississippi,

whereas this antisocial behavior is influenced by household income in Alabama and Georgia. In Alabama, increases in household income led to a decline in criminal behavior and, thus, suggests that improvement in household income for young male ex-offenders may be an effective anti-crime policy in the state. On the contrary, in Georgia, an increase in income results in more criminal offenses; this situation appears to be in conflict with Truman's (2011) assertion that burglary and property crime are more prevalent in lower income households than in higher income households. The findings also run counter to Yang and Lester's (1994) perception that a "good wage" leads to crime desistance.

Findings also indicate that, three years after the adoption of the legislation, there was a significant reduction of recidivism among young adult males in two of the three states – Georgia and Mississippi. For Alabama the legislation did not have significant results. The SCA may yield different results in the long run with more years of its implementation in place. The results of the study reflect the position taken by scholars, such as Anderson (2002), as well as Seiter and Kadela (2003), that reentry programs are effective in reducing recidivism, and runs contrary to the perception expressed by Conrad (1973), and Martinson (1974) that rehabilitation services are ineffective.

It is worth noting that Georgia, which received six Second Chance grant awards between 2010 and 2011, recorded the highest decrease in the proportion of new sentences to prison releases of -12.4 percent, while both Alabama and Mississippi, which received two grant awards each, recorded 2.5 percent and -10 percent respectively. This finding may suggest that adequate funding of reentry services is crucial to the successful implementation of the legislation.

The low amount of SCA funding corroborated with the declining trend of new sentences seems to suggest that the three states may have been relying on their own resources as well as other federal funding sources in providing reentry services. For example, between 2009 and 2011 states also relied on other grant programs to provide reentry resources. Such programs refer to the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) adult drug court discretionary grant program, Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance grant program, BJA Residential substance abuse treatment for state prisoners program grant, BJA Justice and mental health collaboration program expansion grant, BJA Justice and mental health collaboration program: planning and implementation grant, and Justice Assistance program that enhances criminal deterrence and appreciation through electronic surveillance technology for use in high crime areas (Council of State Governments Justice Center online).

In conclusion, overall findings suggest that reentry programs provided by the Second Chance legislation has resulted in a reduction of recidivism among young adult males in two of the three southern states. The results, thus, affirm the perception that rehabilitative services for offenders have the potential of being effective in curbing offenders' tendency to reoffend and, thereby, improving public safety (U.S. Code § 17501 2008). However, it is suggested that more benefits could be achieved if policies and regulations on rehabilitation programs for ex-offenders are comprehensive and compulsory. Currently, reentry services for prisoners are voluntary, with only a fraction of ex-offenders participating in such programs (Coylewright 2004, 403-404).

Through its findings, this study lends support for the indeterminate sentencing approach, with an emphasis on intensive and comprehensive rehabilitation treatments for all inmates after diagnosing their individual problems. Appropriate combination of rehabilitation programs based on the needs of ex-offenders, and integration of prison-based reentry programs with post release treatment may lead to a long-term decrease in recidivism.

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<sup>i</sup> The data for this analysis was obtained from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) National Prisoner Statistics (NPS) series 1978 through 2011. The NPS was mandated by Congress to annually gather information on characteristics of inmates, as well as prison admissions and releases from all states in the United States (Guerino, Harrison and Sabol 2011, 1)

<sup>ii</sup> The total number of annual male prison releases in the data was modified by subtracting the number of dead inmates that were incapable of reoffending.

<sup>iii</sup> Data were collected and reported by the NPS by gender category instead of a race variable.

<sup>iv</sup> Median household income is expressed in real dollars which have been adjusted for inflation by employing the 1982-84 base period of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' data on consumer price index for South Urban Consumers.